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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE: BANDA SAYS PATIENCE AND QUIET PRESSURE  
ONLY WAY TO AVOID CIVIL WAR

Classified By: Ambassador Donald E. Booth for reason(s) 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Zambian President Banda rejected the Ambassador's suggestion he speak out on the egregious situation in Zimbabwe; Banda prefers to pursue quiet, deferential regional diplomacy that emphasizes patience. He believes change is coming, but that an exhausted Mugabe will choose to leave on his own, unless pushed -- in which case he would harden his position and possibly plunge Zimbabwe into violence. Meanwhile, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is planning a humanitarian intervention into Zimbabwe (funded and supported by western donors, it hopes). End summary.

¶2. (C) In a December 18 meeting, Ambassador challenged Zambian President Rupiah Banda to speak out on the worsening situation in Zimbabwe, recalling that during and after the southern Africa liberation struggle and anti-apartheid campaign, "who said what when" was long remembered. Because the will of the Zimbabwean people will ultimately prevail, he added, it is important to be on the record early to express support and sympathy for the suffering Zimbabwean people. Ambassador observed that former President Mwanawasa's courageous, principled statements on Zimbabwe had resonated in Washington and around the world and had benefited Zambia (Note: Ambassador raised Zimbabwe after briefing Banda on Millennium Challenge Corporation's decision to make Zambia eligible for Millennium Challenge Account compact negotiations.)

¶3. (C) The President clearly rejected the idea of making any public statement on Zimbabwe, and signaled that as the most junior head of state in the region, he would pursue quiet, deferential, private diplomacy within SADC. "We are in the middle," he said, noting Swazi, Angolan, Mozambican, and Congolese support for Mugabe. Zambia must play its role cautiously, Banda said. He advocated a common SADC approach and chided the Botswanans for "saying what they want publicly." Banda said that as Mwanawasa's Vice President, he of course supported and agreed with the late leader's statements, "but to repeat them would be academic."

¶4. (C) Banda agreed that it is clear the Zimbabwean people want change and he asserted that Mugabe and his closest supporters realize it. He said that he and his colleagues marvel at the tolerance of the Zimbabwean people for enduring levels of hunger and disease unprecedented in southern Africa. He believes that patience and humanitarian support are the recipe for resolving the situation. Banda believes that Mugabe and his entourage are "exhausted" and are eager to leave, but on their own terms. Banda confided that he had sent former President Kenneth Kaunda to see Mugabe in mid-December and that Kaunda had found Mugabe tired and looking for an exit with dignity. Banda fears that increased pressure on the Harare government or the Zimbabwean security forces would harden positions and perhaps bring about violent conflict or even a full blown civil war. "Don't forget, these people are fighters -- they emerged from an acrimonious liberation movement dating back to the 19th century," Banda warned "My advice to Tsvangirai would be 'don't push the old

man.'" Banda hinted that Western leaders' calls for Mugabe to leave office only stiffened his resolve to stay longer. He cautioned against even suggesting that Mugabe be brought before the International Criminal Court.

15. (C) President Banda advocated supporting the "SADC formula" of continued support for the September 15 powersharing agreement and amendment 19. He emphasized that with patience and quiet pressure, the Mugabe government would eventually leave on its own accord. Banda said that a South African delegation led by Frank Chikane had recently met with Banda to propose SADC neighbors -- with Harare's blessing -- crossing into Zimbabwe to provide humanitarian aid and medical care. Banda said he hoped Zambia and SADC could count on American (and other donors') largesse -- medicines, tents, food, potable water -- to ensure the success of this SADC initiative.

16. (C) Comment: Even more than a potential refugee crisis and the danger of cholera outbreaks, Banda, his government and the Zambian people fear the specter of destabilizing violence on Zambia's southern border. Although the President agreed with the Ambassador's points about the humanitarian crisis and failure of the government in Zimbabwe, Banda believes the way to avoid a civil war in to finalize the September 15 powersharing deal, however imperfectly, so Mugabe can turn over power gracefully and depart with dignity. Banda suggested Mugabe would cede power within 18 months of formation of a coalition government. The proposed SADC humanitarian intervention signals the region's belief that the Mugabe regime has abdicated its responsibilities and governance role to the international community. Banda seemed

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to suggest that once Mugabe has abdicated such responsibility/sovereignty, SADC would be in a better position to leverage further concessions from him. One thing is certain: Banda will not be taking the principled and courageous forward leaning public stance on Zimbabwe we hoped would carry over from his predecessor.

BOOTH